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Sixty-fifth year

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Tuesday, 28 September 2010, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Apakan	(Turkey)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Dunlop
	China	Mr. Yang Tao
	France	Mr. Briens
	Gabon	Mr. Moungara Moussotsi
	Japan	Mr. Nishida
	Lebanon	Mr. Assaf
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Nigeria	Mr. Onemola
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Parham
	United States of America	Ms. Anderson

Agenda

The situation in Sierra Leone

Fifth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (S/2010/471)

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10-55258 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Sierra Leone

Fifth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (S/2010/471)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Sierra Leone, in which he requests that the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mrs. Bangura (Sierra Leone) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: On behalf of the Council, I wish to extend a warm welcome to Her Excellency Mrs. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Michael von der Schulenberg, Executive Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Von der Schulenberg to take a seat at the Council table.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. John McNee, Chairperson of the Sierra Leone configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Canada.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. McNee to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2010/471, containing the fifth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Michael von der Schulenberg and His Excellency Mr. John McNee. I now give the floor to Mr. Von der Schulenberg.

Mr. Von der Schulenburg: I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to introduce the fifth Report of the Secretary-General on Sierra Leone (S/2010/471).

When the Secretary-General visited Freetown on 14 and 15 June, he wanted to draw attention to Sierra Leone's extraordinary achievements in regaining its peace and stability since the end of its civil war. Indeed, Sierra Leone is a country that was able to leave years of dictatorships, repeated military coups and 11 years of a devastating civil war behind it and to embark on building a new peaceful, democratic and more prosperous society. In the more recent period, Sierra Leone has made considerable economic and social progress. The Government has mastered successfully the impact of the recent global food and financial crises in the country, engaged in an ambitious infrastructure development programme, improved agricultural production and increased energy production.

Against the background of the ongoing review of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Government's efforts to provide free medical care to mothers and children under five, its successful programmes to fight HIV/AIDS and malaria, its commercialization programme for small and often desperately poor farmers, and the construction of feeder roads connecting isolated villages to the national road grid are of particular importance. It is

therefore not surprising that Sierra Leone has made steady progress towards achieving the MDG.

In this context, we have also to recognize the considerable long-term support that Sierra Leone has received and still receives from the international community. In particular, we commend President Koroma's commitment to creating Africa's only second independent public broadcaster, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation, which was inaugurated during the Secretary-General's visit. The Corporation is still in its infancy and will have to overcome many challenges to live up to its aspirations and our expectations for it as a professional and impartial voice for Sierra Leone and, it is to be hoped, one day for the subregion. But I am convinced that the enthusiasm and integrity of its independent board members will make it a reliable and impartial voice for Sierra Leone's newly found democracy and an example for other countries in the region to follow.

I will not expand further here on these development issues, as we will discuss them at the Peacebuilding Commission meeting this afternoon. Instead, I would like to use this opportunity to concentrate on three more recent developments that could have a major impact on shaping Sierra Leone's political, social and economic future: first, the Government's efforts to make greater use of the country's mineral and natural resources; secondly, the preparations for the 2012 elections; and thirdly, developments in neighbouring Guinea.

All three of these developments have the potential to bring great benefits to Sierra Leone. The increase in the exploitation of Sierra Leone's rich mineral resources could help break the country's high donor dependency and give it the resources needed to pursue its development goals more aggressively. The 2012 elections could strengthen the country's still young democracy, increase the credibility of State institutions and ultimately help Sierra Leone to cross the magic line of its tenth year since the end of the civil war. Finally, elections and a successful democratic transition in Guinea could, for the first time, create a subregion of like-minded States and open the potential for greater cooperation among the three countries of the Mano River Union in solving many of the shared problems.

While these three developments are indeed a source of hope for Sierra Leone, they also bear considerable risks for its future that, if not managed carefully, could have adverse impacts on the progress made in Sierra Leone in recent years. I shall first talk about the recent mining contracts.

Sierra Leone is a country endowed with rich natural and mineral resources. To manage its mineral resources better, the Government enacted a new mining law last year and began, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to renegotiate existing mining contracts for the exploitation of diamonds and rutile, a precursor for the production of titanium. More recently, the Government concluded two significant mining contracts for the exploitation of the country's large iron ore resources that could give extractive industries in Sierra Leone's economy an unprecedented dominant role. In fact, with its largely unexploited gold resources and the potential of economically viable off-shore oil and gas reserves, Sierra Leone may be on the verge of turning from a major recipient of foreign aid to becoming a major exporter of primary mineral and hydrocarbon products. This is surely a welcome development for Sierra Leone, as well as for an international community that has invested so much in Sierra Leone's stability and development over the past 10 years or more.

However, experiences in different parts of the world suggest that countries depending on the export of raw materials are often plagued with great difficulties. Dependence on mining and oil exports has often resulted in social dislocations, huge income disparities and rampant corruption that have at times erupted into violent internal conflicts. In fact, Sierra Leone itself has had such bitter experience in the past. Today, its formerly diamond-rich district of Kono is one of the poorest areas of Sierra Leone, with one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, especially among its youth. Much of its once fertile agricultural lands are now dotted with water-logged holes and Kono's destroyed infrastructure. The many burned-out houses still bear witness to the destructive force of a civil war that was largely funded by so-called blood diamonds from that very district.

It is the sheer size of the two iron ore mining contracts that elicit unease, as they could become a game-changer for Sierra Leone, with the potential to dramatically change the country's economic, social and political landscape. This applies in particular to the mining agreement for the large Tonkolili iron ore deposits. If official pronouncements are correct, the

financial turnover of that mining operation alone would dwarf the financial and organizational capacities of the Government itself.

Therefore, it is incumbent on all concerned, in particular the Government of Sierra Leone, to make all the necessary efforts to ensure that its emphasis on extractive industries is put on the right track from the very beginning. Concerns about the mining agreements — especially their compliance with Sierra Leone's mining law, the transparency of contract negotiations or concerns about how much economic power has been given to a single external investor — should be taken seriously. Further, concerns about the influence that such huge commercial interests could have on the integrity of an underpaid public service, the media and civil society will require attention.

I am convinced that even large-scale mining contracts can be managed in a way that both the international investor and the country will emerge as winners. Against that background, I welcome the assurances given by President Koroma of his determination to ensure that all mining agreements will be compliant with Sierra Leone's laws and with international practices, to increase transparency in the mining sector, and to seek external assistance in beefing up national capacities to deal with the challenges of large-scale mining concessions. I also wish to express gratitude to the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and, closer to home, UNDP for their offers of assistance to enable the Government to manage this critical aspect of Sierra Leone's development.

I shall now turn to the elections. The next nationwide elections in Sierra Leone will be held in the latter part of 2012 — that is, only two years from now. Despite the remaining time, it feels as if the electoral campaign has already started. Press statements, interviews, relatively unimportant by-elections and even certain other social events are taking on the form of early electoral campaigns. Regrettably, the main political parties accuse each other of shady intentions, and the opposition has expressed increasing mistrust of the impartiality of key State institutions. There are fears that both sides could try to prevent the other from campaigning legitimately in their respective political strongholds. Recent by-elections for parliamentary and local council seats also witnessed similar incidents, as well as violence or the threat of violence.

All indications are that the 2012 elections could be challenging and complex. This is partly due to the fact that the country will run three nation-wide elections at the same time: presidential, parliamentary and local council elections. But also other factors — such as a winner-take-all electoral system, a likely two-party contest, both with their regional strongholds, temptations to exploit regional and ethnic differences as well as the newly found wealth from recent mining contracts — could all contribute to highly contested and potentially difficult elections.

To mitigate conflicts in the run-up to and during the 2012 elections, it is critical that the institutional framework responsible for conducting the elections be accepted by all sides as being professional, credible and, even more important, impartial. This applies in particular to the two main electoral bodies: the National Electoral Commission and the Political Party Registration Commission. Other national institutions, such as the Sierra Leone police, the Independent Media Commission and the newly established Independent Broadcasting Corporation also have very important roles to play in this context. In view of that, serious efforts should be made to address all outstanding issues involving electoral management bodies and other relevant institutions well in advance of the elections.

In this context, I would like to urge the National Electoral Commission to do more to alleviate fears within the main opposition following the reappointment of the chief electoral officer. At the same time, I call on the main opposition party to show greater flexibility in discussing their electoral concerns without getting entangled in personality conflicts. Although much work has been done in strengthening the Political Party Registration Commission to carry out its important regulatory and mediation functions, its effectiveness is hampered by the fact that its chair has been vacant for over two years.

We are pleased to note that the Sierra Leone police and its leadership have committed themselves to regular dialogue with all political parties and to protect the operational impartiality and professionalism of the force in providing security during the electoral process. The police should increase its capacity in non-lethal crowd-control techniques and refrain from any temptation to use assault weapons in social

disturbances. An early establishment of an independent police complaints committee, as envisaged in the joint communiqué, will also greatly enhance confidence in the police.

The role of the media in the electoral process will be critical and the Independent Media Commission is expected to protect the media from undue political and commercial influences. In this context, the creation of the Guild of Editors of the major newspapers is a very welcome initiative.

If the 2007 and 2008 elections or recent by-elections are any indication, ethnicity and regional divisions may play a much greater role in the upcoming elections. This could add a dangerous dimension to the elections. I therefore hope that more efforts will be made by all political stakeholders to defuse this potential for conflict well in advance of the election. This could also include greater efforts by the Government to create a better regional balance in appointments of its senior political and civil service positions.

Finally, we are concerned about the Government's intention to hold an inquest into the 1992 extrajudicial executions by the former military Government, the National Provisional Ruling Council, which ruled the country between 1992 and 1996. This action by the Government could be misunderstood by many in the opposition as an effort to influence the 2012 elections and could open the way for demands for all sorts of new inquests into past atrocities. If the Government proceeds with the inquest, it should make its intentions much clearer in order to obviate misinterpretations later.

Let me now turn to the third issue: Guinea. It may be no surprise to Council members that Sierra Leoneans look with apprehension at developments in its larger neighbour, Guinea. There is much at stake for Sierra Leone. Should Guinea manage its democratic transition well, it would make the subregion more stable and give Sierra Leone wider options in solving subregional problems, including cross-border trading and subregional security concerns such as illicit drug trafficking and illegal fishing. However, should the democratic transition in Guinea be stalled or even reversed, that could have serious negative consequences for Sierra Leone. The ethnic, cultural and geographical links between the two countries, the long border with a number of yet unsolved issues, as well as the large quantities of small weapons in Guinea, could make any potential conflict in Guinea trickle down into Sierra Leone.

Against this background, I feel that we should all commend President Koroma and his Liberian counterpart, President Johnson-Sirleaf for their careful approach in support of the democratic transition in their fellow neighbouring country.

Finally, let me use this opportunity to share with this Council some concerns about our own integrated peacebuilding mission in Sierra Leone. When the Secretary-General visited Sierra Leone, he wanted also to draw attention to a successful United Nations intervention and in particular to the new model of an integrated peacebuilding mission that could serve as an example to other United Nations interventions. We have been able to prove that it is possible to draw down from one of the largest peacekeeping missions into a much smaller and purely civilian mission while maintaining a credible political and development engagement in the country. As I mentioned before, the new peacebuilding mission costs Member States only 2.2 per cent of the previous peacekeeping operations.

Unfortunately, all of these successes and savings have not translated into any increase in United Nations financial resources for development purposes, in Sierra Leone a key factor for our peacebuilding strategy. In fact, funding to United Nations operations is steadily declining. This is a worrying trend as it will no doubt jeopardize the United Nations work and credibility. It could also jeopardize the integrated approach to peacebuilding. I intend to discuss this issue in more detail at the Peacebuilding Commission meeting this afternoon but would appreciate also the Council's continued support.

Sierra Leone may today no longer be one of the Council's most critical concerns today. And this is a good sign. But I would urge the Council not to abandon Sierra Leone completely: it is a potential success story, not only for Sierra Leone but also for the Security Council. Sierra Leone will continue to need the Council as the United Nations will continue to need Sierra Leone.

Finally, let me express here my thanks through the Minister for Foreign Affairs to President Koroma and his Government, members of the political parties and civil society in Sierra Leone for their cooperation and hospitality.

The President: I thank Mr. Von der Schulenburg for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. McNee.

Mr. McNee: I am pleased to have the opportunity to brief the Council in my capacity as Chair of the Sierra Leone configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. While the past year has seen Sierra Leone make considerable strides forward, significant challenges remain. Ten years after the end of the civil war and two years ahead of the third set of national elections, Sierra Leone stands poised to consolidate peace fully and embark on long-term economic development. Doing so successfully will require continued support.

The Peacebuilding Commission is currently considering the progress that has been achieved in consolidating peace in Sierra Leone and is charting its future engagement. Indeed, the Sierra Leone configuration will meet this afternoon to discuss these issues and adopt an outcome document containing conclusions and recommendations. This review process has focused on the joint progress report on the Agenda for Change prepared by the Government of Sierra Leone in full collaboration with the United Nations, international partners and civil society.

The report in our view is an impressive achievement. Its preparation reflected strong national ownership and included the participation of a wide range of national stakeholders, including civil society. Its findings are comprehensive, mapping progress across the entire Agenda for Change and providing important recommendations for future action. Given that the review monitors progress on the basis of all actors' contributions, it continues Sierra Leone's exemplary record as a country where standards for aid effectiveness, engagement in post-conflict States and integrated service delivery are put into practice.

As decided last year, the Peacebuilding Commission has focused its engagement on the major threats to peace consolidation identified in the Agenda for Change, specifically concerning good governance and the rule of law, youth employment and drug trafficking. There have been successes in each of those areas. The Anti-Corruption Commission continues its excellent work, now under the able leadership of a new Commissioner. The establishment of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation as an independent media organization will help further democratization. The Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force has been transformed into the Transnational Crime Unit under the West Africa Coast Initiative.

Sierra Leone has also made important changes to its youth employment and empowerment strategy, moving to better match skills-training and employment programmes with market demand. The creation and ongoing establishment of the National Youth Commission represents another significant step forward.

But to that list of successes one must add emerging needs. Attention is rightly turning to preparations for the 2012 elections, as Mr. Von der Schulenburg just noted. Those elections represent one of the significant remaining challenges before Sierra Leone completes the process of consolidating peace and embarks on longer-term development.

It is essential that political conditions be established for free, fair and peaceful elections. That will require continued progress on implementing the agreements in the joint communiqué of April 2009, further strengthening the Political Parties Registration Commission and providing the National Electoral Commission with the necessary support. Continuing to build the capacity of the Sierra Leone police to serve as a neutral and effective force for stability will also be critical. Most important, it is imperative that the major political parties engage in a manner that reinforces peaceful democratic governance and mitigates burgeoning regional tensions within the country.

The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), under the able leadership of the Executive Representative of the Secretary-General, has already conducted a series of activities intended to improve multiparty dialogue, mediate wider political tensions and build capacity to respond to incidents of public disorder. It is clear that this particular aspect of UNIPSIL's mandate will be of growing importance over the next year. Sierra Leone is also increasingly taking advantage of its abundant natural resources. The latent economic potential of the mining sector in particular holds great promise for generating growth, strengthening Sierra Leone's budget and reducing dependency on aid.

Yet, as we have all seen in other contexts, natural resources also bring risks. Resources must be managed in a transparent manner that delivers the economic benefits of a peace dividend to the population as a

whole. Sierra Leone's membership in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the Kimberly Process are important initiatives in that respect.

(*spoke in French*)

Let me conclude by turning to a crucial issue with respect to peacebuilding. For the most part, Sierra Leone has established the strategic and institutional mechanisms needed to coordinate and implement peacebuilding activities. In the Agenda for Change and the United Nations Joint Vision, the country has two comprehensive and integrated strategies. Yet the need for resources remains significant.

The United Nations multi-donor trust fund established to fund the Joint Vision and, in that regard, to support the Agenda for Change, has to date received only $10 million towards a multi-year target of $204 million. While the international community has been quick to commend the particular model of integrated peacebuilding developed in the country, it has been slower to mobilize resources. Recognizing this need, the Sierra Leone configuration has decided to develop a resource mobilization plan to help meet current funding targets, attract non-traditional donors and explore alternate means of providing international assistance.

Sierra Leone remains a multilateral success story in peacebuilding, but the country is at a critical juncture. A final investment in peace is necessary to secure the gains that have been made since the end of the civil war. The Peacebuilding Commission stands ready to continue assisting Sierra Leone's efforts to mitigate the major threats to peace. It also wants to support the country in the preparations for the holding of free, fair and peaceful elections in 2012. Lastly, the Peacebuilding Commission is determined to assist the country to build a durable and comprehensive peace to the benefit of all Sierra Leoneans.

The President: I thank Mr. McNee for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone.

Mrs. Bangura (Sierra Leone): My delegation congratulates you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of September. We would also like to thank you for convening this meeting on the situation in Sierra Leone and for giving us the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

We also express our sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for his detailed report (S/2010/471) on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL). Among other things, the report highlights the important developments that have taken place in the country, the challenges to surmount and, of course, the activities of UNIPSIL during the period under review. The recent visit of the Secretary-General to our country was particularly productive and remains fresh in the minds of all Sierra Leoneans, as it coincided with the inauguration of the second-ever independent public broadcaster in Africa, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation.

We would also like to pay particular tribute to the Executive Representative of the Secretary-General for his statement this morning, as well as to the Chair of the Sierra Leone country-specific configuration, Ambassador John McNee, for his usual meaningful and instructive contribution to this debate.

For due economy of time, I will resist the temptation to recount in detail all the important developments that have taken place in my country during the period under review, as President Ernest Bai Koroma, in addressing the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session, already did so five days ago by outlining some of the visible progress his Government has made during that time, in partnership with the international community, in the process of consolidating peace and security to promote economic growth and development.

Many of those efforts and successes, which are also reflected in the report before us today, have equally been acclaimed in indicators, such as those of the Global Peace Index, which ranks Sierra Leone as the fifty-third most peaceful country in the world; the Mo Ibrahim Index, which reflects our significantly improved ranking in democratic governance among crisis-affected countries; the World Bank rankings on doing business; and the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, among others. However, the President was very forthright in cautioning against complacency based on our achievements so far and in asserting that those accolades should serve as a catalyst for the Government to intensify its efforts to improve the quality of life of its people.

The Government is fully cognizant of the importance of some of the issues that the Secretary-General raises in the report with regard to the implementation of the joint communiqué of 2 April 2009, in particular with respect to such matters as the dialogue among political parties, the report of the Independent Review Panel, the proposed inquest into the executions, on 29 December 1992, of a former inspector-general of the police and 27 others, and the enhancement of the political participation of women in Sierra Leone.

With respect to furthering the culture of political tolerance, President Koroma has consistently emphasized that, irrespective of political affiliation or religious denomination, the bonds of unity that bind us together as a nation are stronger than the issues that have a tendency to divide us. In one such instance, he reassured the country by asserting:

> "I am President of the country and I have a responsibility to unify the country. I have a responsibility to let everybody develop a new concept of democracy, a new culture of democracy, and that is, you are not enemy with anybody. You are just maybe opponents on political issues, but at the end of the day we must present ourselves as Sierra Leoneans, united in the development of our country."

On various occasions, he has extended the olive branch and has been quick to point out that tolerance is a two-way street and that all Sierra Leoneans should strive for a unified nation. He has demonstrated his commitment to deepening the democratic process and unifying the country, not only by his regular visits around the country, but also by ensuring that the development programmes initiated by the Government are implemented fairly throughout the country, irrespective of the political leanings or ethnicity of any particular region or locale.

The Government is fully committed to strengthening governance and private sector development. The fight against corruption is unrelenting. A new anti-corruption Commissioner has been appointed, and the Government continues to provide financial support for the implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy. The commitment to fighting drug trafficking and transnational organized crime is equally vigorous. We have transformed the Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force into the Transnational Crime Unit, with much greater leverage to eradicate that pernicious menace. However, it is greatly in need of sustained technical assistance and support.

On another major front in the ongoing peacebuilding initiative, we have been able to take further steps to address the concerns of the young people of the country. A Youth Commissioner was recently appointed to lead the National Youth Commission, established to formulate strategy and policy related to the empowerment and involvement of the youth population in nation-building and national development. That clearly signals the Commission's readiness to undertake its responsibilities and to start work on implementing its strategies. We would therefore appreciate more concrete support from all our partners, including those that have been actively involved in addressing that challenge.

With respect to the forthcoming 2012 elections, the Government is committed to ensuring that the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission deliver effectively on their constitutional mandate, independently and free of interference. In that regard, my colleague the Minister for Finance and Economic Development, has already started mobilizing support and the necessary resources to set the stage for a credible, free, fair and fully participatory process. We count on the United Nations and the international community to respond promptly and favourably to his call to action.

Achieving openness and transparency in the exploitation of our mineral resources is one of the most fundamental aspects of the Government's development policy, with the political will to ensure that the country's vast mineral wealth is exploited for the benefit of the people. To that end, the Government is very receptive to the concerns that have been raised over the mining agreements entered into recently, and is strongly disposed to put in place modalities to address those concerns with a view to ensuring full compliance with the country's mineral laws.

Despite the Government's efforts and the progress that has been made to date in addressing many of the problems that led to the civil war, challenges still abound. Some aspects of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission still require support for their full implementation. Most notably, the reparations process remains largely underfunded some

six years after the recommendations were issued. On the socio-economic front, the prevailing global economic and financial uncertainties are seriously undermining our efforts to turn around the economy as quickly as desired.

In view of the severe impact of those uncertainties on our efforts, we appeal for urgent and appropriate attention to be given to the delivery of the pledges made at the most recent Consultative Group meeting on Sierra Leone, held in London.

I would like to reiterate my Government's commitment to playing a constructive role in addressing the unfolding events and democratization process in the sister Republic of Guinea. We are satisfied that our National Electoral Commission was able to facilitate and ensure the enfranchisement of Guinean citizens in Sierra Leone, particularly within the context of the Mano River Union. In that regard, we will continue to monitor events with intense interest.

The Government is actively considering the report of the Independent Review Panel, as well as the proposed inquest into the extrajudicial executions of 29 December 1992, involving a former inspector-general and 27 other private citizens, with due regard to resolving this matter in the best interests of the nation.

In conclusion, I would like to register our gratitude to the members of Council for their sustained interest in and engagement with Sierra Leone. We look forward to their steadfast support of our continuing efforts to ensure sustainable peace and long-term prosperity in Sierra Leone and to keep this potential success story on course.

We share the concerns raised by the Executive Representative of the Secretary-General on the steady decline in funding of United Nations operations, in particular UNIPSIL, and the adverse effect that it will have on the work and credibility of the United Nations. We hope that that decline will be effectively addressed by Council.

The President: I thank Minister Bangura for her statement.

There are no other speakers inscribed on my list. In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.